

Message Text

SECRET

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10

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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R 141505Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2666

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 0550

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MASS, SY, UR, HEG

SUBJECT: SOVIET ARMS ASSISTANCE TO EGYPT AND SYRIA

1. IN WIDE RANGING DISCUSSION FEB 11 WITH COS
SHIHABI WE TOUCHED ON SOVIET MILITARY RELATIONSHIPS
WITH BOTH DAMASCUS AND CAIRO.

2. SHIHABI NOTED HE HAD PROTESTED TO EGYPTIAN COS
GAMASSY DURING THE RECENT ARAB DEFENSE COUNCIL
MEETING IN CAIRO THAT EGYPT SHOULD STOP TALKING OF
ALLEGEDLY GENEROUS SOVIET ARMS SUPPLY TO SYRIA AS
A LEVER TO GET MORE ARMS FOR EGYPT ITSELF FROM SOVIET
AND OTHER SOURCES. SAID HE HAD HANDED GAMASSY LATEST
INVENTORY OF SYRIAN WEAPONS WHICH DEMONSTRATED

A. THAT THE USSR HAD RESTORED SYRIA TO ITS PRE-
OCTOBER 1973 LEVEL IN CERTAIN CATEGORIES OF ARMAMENT
AND

B. IN NO CATEGORY HAD IT MADE SYRIA STRONGER THAN PRIOR
OCTOBER 1973

HE LABELED AS "PRESS EXAGGERATION AND ISRAELI PROPAGANDA"

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REPORTS THERE WERE GREATER QUANTITIES OF GROUND-TO-

GROUND MISSILES AND MIG-23 AIRCRAFT IN SYRIAN ARSENAL
TODAY COMPARED TO PRE-OCTOBER 1973.

3. SHIHABI THEN VOLUNTEERED FOLLOWING COMMENTS ON
SOVIET/EGYPTIAN AND SOVIET/SYRIAN POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS.
EGYPT CREATED MUCH OF ITS TROUBLES WITH MOSCOW BY
ACQUIESCING TO SOVIET PRESSURES FOR FACILITIES/BASES
IN EGYPT IN THE LATE 60'S. EGYPT HAD APPARENTLY
FOUND THESE PRESSURES IRRESISTIBLE COINCIDING AS THEY
DID WITH MASSIVE U.S. ARMS SUPPLY TO ISRAEL AND ISRAELI
DEEP BOMBINGS OF EGYPTIAN TERRITORY. SYRIA HAD WARNED
EGYPT AGAINST MAKING CONCESSIONS TO THE SOVIETS BE
THEY EITHER OF POLITICAL NATURE SUCH AS THE SOVIET-
EGYPTIAN FRIENDSHIP TREATY OR MILITARY IN TERMS OF
BASE CONCESSIONS. "CAIRO WAS WELL AWARE OF HOW
ANGRY WE WERE WITH IT ON BOTH ACCOUNTS." SOON AFTER
A MAJOR SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE WAS ESTABLISHED IN
EGYPT, SERIOUS FRICTIONS BEGAN TO DEVELOP BETWEEN
MOSCOW AND CAIRO.

4. I OBSERVED THAT MOSCOW SEEMED TO HAVE MANAGED ITS
RELATIONS MORE SMOOTHLY AND TACTFULLY WITH DAMASCUS.
SHIHABI REPLIED THAT SOVIETS HAD NEVER HESITATED TO
EXERT INTENSE PRESSURE FOR BASES/FACILITIES IN SYRIA.
EVEN TODAY SOVIETS WERE QUICK TO RAISE THIS ISSUE
"WHENEVER THEY FELT THEY HAD AN OPENING" ALTHOUGH THEY
ARE NOW WELL AWARE OF SYRIAN SENSIBILITIES ABOUT
ITS NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY. SYRIA HAD COUNTERED THIS
SOVIET PRESSURE REPEATEDLY WITH THE POSITION THAT IT
"HAD NO INTENTION OF GIVING UP ONE INCH OF SYRIAN
TERRITORY FOR SOVIET PURPOSES."

5. COMMENT: WHILE THIS EMBASSY DOES NOT HAVE
RESOURCES OR INFORMATION TO ASSESS FULLY SHIHABI'S
STATEMENTS RE EQUIPMENT RECEIVED
FROM SOVIETS, WE SUSPECT HE IS UNDERSTANDING CASE,
PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO SAMS AND POSSIBLY MIG-23S.
ON OTHER HAND, HE IS ACCURATELY REFLECTING SARG IRRITATION
WITH EGYPT'S POOR-MOUTHING AT SYRIAN EXPENSE IN ORDER TO
EXTRACT MORE ARMS FROM SOVIETS.

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6. ACTION REQUESTED: INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY EVALUATION
OF SHIHABI'S ASSERTIONS RE CURRENT SYRIAN INVENTORY
VS THAT PRE-OCTOBER WAR.
MURPHY

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NNN

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